COMMENTARY

By: **CRAIG WASHINGTON**, *Program Coordinator - AID Atlanta*

WALK IN THE LIGHT

"Walk in the light. Beautiful light. Up where the dew drops of mercy shine bright. Shine all around us by day and by night. Love is the light of the world."

On the eve of Martin Luther King Day, about 50 black gays and lesbians assembled to bring about communal healing. How fitting that this summit was produced in the name of Bayard Rustin, an openly gay man who was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. How appropriate that this event was held during the weekend celebration of Dr. King's life in the city that was his home.

It was an evening of hard work, fun and fellowship. We gathered at Emory University's student center, to initiate a course of focused activism that will effect positive change for same-gender-loving folk in Atlanta. First we identified what we felt were the 10 most critical issues facing our folks. Breakout groups were assigned to further define these issues and plan strategies to address them. Once these tactics were offered, each participant chose an area to work on. It was a very fruitful discussion led by Etawe, President of Folami, a black lesbian organization, and the irrepressible Duncan Teague. In the near future participants will develop and help implement action plans. Organizations like Folami, In The Life Atlanta (ITLA), 2nd Sunday, Unity Fellowship Church of Atlanta and others will take on key roles in this intervention.

As a community worker, I was excited to see several folks I did not know. You know its always good to welcome "new blood" to the choir. We were joined by some Chocolate City kin, Donna Payne and Andre Alexander both from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in Washington D.C. As a black gay man I was moved by the level of communion demonstrated by my beautiful sisters and brothers. I felt the presence of my departed friend Tony Daniels in that space and was assured he would have been proud of his people in that moment. Dinner followed the dialogue and the food was exquisite thanks to Damal Edmond. Graphic Artist (and deejay extraordinaire) Edwin Cook provided just the right touch of musical ambience as we relaxed and started cuttin up. It was a job well done. A special thanks to Sara Lynn Chesnutt Director of the Office of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Life at Emory for hookin' us up with our meeting place.

Now the March was more than I could have ever expected. I was overjoyed and outdone. You see, traditionally, the gay contingent of the march is led by white people with a subset of black folks in the mix. This year we were out front, outwrite...just Out and leading the contingent. This was an occasion laden with meaning. There we were, proud men and women, proclaiming our rightful place in a predominately black historic event (and movement). It was such a powerful act, to display our full identity with dignity before our extended family. We sang freedom songs and chanted about being "out of the closet now"! Unfortunately it is from this very "family" that many of us received our deepest wounds. How affirming then it was to "sally forth" down fabled Auburn Avenue carrying a banner that says who we are and receive applause. Oh trust there were some curious stares, but from all accounts there were no negative comments from onlookers. Sister Joy Williams said it best. "We were out there, singing songs like "Walk In The Light" because that's who we are and they recognize that." I thought about those same-sex attracted adolescents and young adults in the crowd who have few visible models that reflect who they are. I hope that our presence was somehow helpful for them. I felt honored to be a part of this commemoration and I have much respect for Ms. Coretta Scott King who speaks out loud and often against anti-gay oppression.

I mentioned a lot of names in my comments because I want you to know the people who are out there building resources of support for brothers and sisters in the life. If you are curious about the aforementioned community project, please call and get involved. It is frustrating to hear those who claim that there is no real black gay community but do not consider calling a contact number or attending a meeting. We've got enough commentators, we need you on the field.

Peace and Prosperity.

Craig.

For more info about the above-mentioned community activities, please call the Folami hotline at 404-284-3053.

Craig Washington is the Program Coordinator for The Deeper Love Project, an HIV Prevention program for black gay men at AID Atlanta. He also serves as Vice-Chair of 2nd Sunday, a black gay men's support organization.

a workshop series for gay men of African Descent.

Deeper LOVE

COME DISCUSS

Wednesday, Feb. 3, 10, 17, 24
Wednesday, March. 10, 17, 24, 31

Men
Sexuality
Intimacy
Communication

6:30 to 9:00 pm

• REGISTRATION $10.00

More Than You Think

AID Atlanta
(404) 872-0600
www.aidatlanta.org

1438 West Peachtree Street
Please call Craig Washington
404-872-0600 ext. 271
Please register quickly • Space is limited

LAYOUT BY: eM

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